

Lincoln campaign banner back on display at Old State Capitol

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Little is known about the large 1860 presidential campaign banner for Abraham Lincoln and Hannibal Hamlin that hangs prominently on a second-floor wall of the Old State Capitol. There's no provenance, but Illinois Historic Preservation officials are "pretty sure" it came into the state's possession in the 1960s.

Its authenticity, however, has never been an issue.

The banner, which measures roughly 61/2 feet tall by 5 feet wide, simply states "For President, Abraham Lincoln" and "For Vice President, Hannibal Hamlin." An illustration of Lincoln is centered in the middle.

For the past six months, the banner has been undergoing a \$3,650 restoration at The Chicago Conservation Center. Made of cotton with silk fringes, the banner basically was glued to a paperboard base during an earlier renovation in the late '60s. Illinois Historic Preservation Agency conservationist Malcolm Brown was hoping to unglue the banner, but experts concluded it was too risky. "The main question is whether this (banner) is a stable piece," Brown said Tuesday afternoon at the Old State Capitol State Historic Site, where he was putting the final touches on its re-installation. "Reversing the old process would have done more damage. The goal was to remove it, but it wasn't necessary."

In the three decades since the banner's first restoration, conservation science has made numerous advancements, Brown said. Conservationists know a lot more about material degradation and how factors such as a item's acidity impacts its life span.

"Acidity is one of the biggest issues," he said.

It's difficult to determine the campaign banner's value. Because the state self-insures its artifacts, it doesn't have to have them professionally appraised, IHPA spokesman Dave Blanchette said.

However, the banner probably is worth at least a few thousand dollars. An Internet auction site selling historic artifacts currently is holding bidding on an 1860 campaign circular with a missing piece torn from one corner. As of Tuesday, the offer was \$850.

Regardless of its value, Old Capitol supervisor Justin Blandford is happy to have it back. While also unsure of its origin, Blandford suggests the old statehouse is a suitable home.

"We can connect it to this building's life," Blandford said. "Twenty feet away (from the banner) was Lincoln's political headquarters during the campaign."

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